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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the case study method of instruction and its application to the teaching of English for special purposes in university business schools. Students are given cases adapted to their level that allow them to solve business problems, such as contract negotiations, while improving their English comprehension and communication skills. This method teaches communication, presentation, teamwork, information gathering, and writing skills while introducing students to various fields of business. The teacher's role in the case study approach consists of introducing cases, leading discussions, acting as a resource person, and providing feedback to the students. The approach allows students to explore areas of interest or expertise and is student-centered, thus encouraging students to take responsibility for their success in the course. (MDM)

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ED 370 385

TEACHING ESP-B AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE CASE STUDY METHOD

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Teachers at schools of business have been using the case study method to teach content areas for several decades. However, recently, teachers of ESL-Business and Business Communication have discovered the suitability of this method to their disciplines. They have discovered that this approach motivates their students while turning their classroom into laboratories of communication and language learning. It is the purpose of this paper to introduce the case study method and encourage its use in the above mentioned classes.

I. THE METHOD

The case study method is adapted from the Harvard Business School approach to teaching content. The cases consist of business problems to be solved through discussion and role play. Examples of cases in my book are contract negotiations, the development of incentive packages, the development of marketing schemes, job finding including interviewing techniques and resume and

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letter of application writing. Their rationale is that realistic cases provide an opportunity for hands on experience which allows students to apply their theoretical knowledge and develop managerial skills. In adapting this method to ESP-B and Business Communications, one maintains Harvard's goal of training students to think like managers while adding language and communication skills. The case study method is equally effective for both groups, the only difference being the emphasis on language correction and vocabulary in the ESP-B courses. The other skills--presentation, teamwork and interaction, information gathering and writing are basic to any course in communication. The case study method to quote Frances Boyd, "fits a major goal of professional education: providing a 'sheltered situation' in which students can practice reflection-in-action while playing the role of a professional"[1]. This practice facilitates acquisition of the communication and language skills which the students will need in filling their future role as business professionals.

The students are given a case which has been adapted to their level in order to allow them to solve it

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1 Frances A. Boyd. "Business English and the Case Method: A Reassessment. TESOL Quarterly. vol. 25. no. 4 (Winter, 1991), 731.

within a reasonable amount of time. They are asked to discuss questions which are designed to activate their minds and get them thinking in the mode of the case. They are given guidelines to aid them in solving the case and each group a chooses role to play. The first hour of case preparation is done in class which gives the teacher the opportunity to make sure the students are on track as well as to give the students a chance to ask questions regarding their role and strategy. This also gives the teacher the chance to "cross-fertilize," by going from one group to another asking questions such as, "if group A did such and such what would you do" which helps prime the groups for the confrontation that will occur during the presentation phase. The presentation phase consists of the role play where the case is solved. Finally, the teacher provides feedback regarding both the content and language. The ESP-B feedback session will naturally focus on language, while in Business Communication the focus will be more on content and communication techniques. However, in both adaptations, the students learn a variety of oral communication and critical/analytical skills. The final stage, the written exercise, teaches students resume, business letter, report, and memo writing.

II. THE RATIONALE FOR THE METHOD

The realistic nature of the cases turns the classroom into a laboratory for business communication which allows the teaching of a variety of related skills both to students of business communication and ESP-B. In the case of ESP-B, what might have been only a traditional language course, becomes expanded to a communications course. In addition, this approach provides both student groups an introduction to the various fields of business such as finance, investment, banking, marketing, human resources, business organization and management, labor relations and international trade, just to mention the areas covered in the the book I have written, Global Markets: A Case Study Book For International Management. Thus, while teaching communication, presentation, teamwork and interaction, information gathering and writing skills as well as language and vocabulary, this method provides a general introduction to the various fields of business. I teach presentation technique and touch on communication theory and group interaction not only because these skills are basic to solving the cases, but

are vital to success in business world. Everything we do in class is related to the real world of business, and the relevance to business of these skills is used as a motivator to activate the students. I constantly emphasize that the course goal is not the end of the semester, but success in the business world upon graduation. The success of this method was summed up by one of my students at the Norwegian School of Management who said: "Firty percent of being a good manager is being able to communicate and we have to take an English course to learn how to communicate." It is my impression that of all the courses the students at that school take, English is the one that they like the most because it is hands-on and activates them the most. In any case, the English department was chosen by the students for a special award and is the only department ever given that award.

III. TEACHING THE CASES

The teacher-centered aspect of this approach is limited to introducing the cases, leading discussions, the giving lectures on subjects such as resume writing, audience centered communication and language

instruction. The introduction phase, step one, is very important as any misunderstanding of the goal of the case or the various groups' role can lead to disaster. I ask various students to explain the case in order to make sure that there is no misunderstanding. Then the groups are given the chance to choose their role on a first come first serve basis. Step two is a discussion where the questions are designed to get the students involved by getting them to commit themselves by expressing a point of view. The third step is the in-class preparation. This gives the students the opportunity to ask questions about their role and gives the teacher the opportunity to "cross-fertilize" or give ideas to help groups prepare their role. In class preparation also gives the ESP-B teacher the opportunity to correct as well as note language mistakes and vocabulary problems which will be used in providing feedback both immediately to the student making the mistake and in step four, the general class feedback session. Correcting grammar mistakes on the spot and supplying the student with vocabulary to be used immediately in context insures efficient learning. In the feedback session, new vocabulary and vocabulary mistakes are discussed with the entire class, written on

the board and the students are expected to use the words in sentences during the next class session. Grammar mistakes made in class form the basis of the grammar part of the feedback sessions. Whereas students are often reluctant to study grammar, they are more responsive when the focus is on mistakes that they have just made. Step five consists of out-of-class preparation where the students finalize their roles. Step six is the role play in class. During this role play, the ESP-B teacher notes grammar and vocabulary problems for the feedback session as well as comments about content. The Business Communications teacher focuses on noting content comments for the feedback session. The feedback session, step seven, follows directly after the presentation. The final stage is the writing phase which is preceded by a lecture on resume, letter, report and memo writing.

IV. THE TEACHER'S ROLE

The role of the teacher in the case study method requires a change in mind set from a more traditional teacher-centered approach to the role of activator and resource person. The teacher must cede center stage in

order to give the students the opportunity to get actively involved in the cases. Part of the teacher's role involves creating the proper class atmosphere which I try to do in the opening session by, among other things, suggesting that 20 heads are better than one. I emphasize that we have two areas of expertise--mine being communication and theirs being business administration. By casting them in the role of experts, I encourage them to share their expertise and thus to communicate. No teacher of the case study method is expected to be an expert in all areas covered by the cases (although it is amazing how much one learns by listening to student presentations). The students are encouraged to use their area of expertise which gives them a sense of equality with the teacher. Furthermore, being perceived as experts encourages the students to obtain the necessary information and develop the skills necessary to fill that role. This new role is pedagogically sound because it encourages the use of all the skills you are trying to teach.

The teacher's role in the case study approach consists of:

INTRODUCER OF CASES, DISCUSSION LEADER AND LECTURER

These are areas where the class is somewhat teacher centered. Particularly in the introduction of the cases, it is necessary that the whole class focus on the purpose of the cases which is best achieved in the teacher-centered approach. The lectures on communication skills can be a combination of lecture and discussion. The discussion questions can either be presented as teacher-led activities or as debates or group presentations.

A RESOURCE PERSON

In going around from group to group during the case preparation, the teacher can provide language correction, vocabulary, ideas and strategy suggestions and cross-fertilization.

THE BENEVOLENT POLICEMAN

The teacher insures that the students get to work on the cases immediately by prodding them with questions

which will help them focus on their roles. In addition,the ESL-B teacher must insure that the students do not slip back into their native language.

PROVIDER OF FEEDBACK

After each group session or presentation, the ESP-B teacher should provide language correction and vocabulary. After each presentation, both the ESP-B and Business Communication teacher should provide feedback on content, as well as communication technique. A discussion can be held about the various groups' strategies and the success of the strategies in the role play.

V. CONCLUSION

The case study method an exciting, dynamic approach to learning in which everyone participates and learns. It is reality oriented as all the cases are drawn from real life situations which also acts to motivate the students.

This approach is pedagogically sound as it encourages the students' active participation which is a key element in all pedagogy. Furthermore, it creates a

sense of responsibility among the students while giving them credit for possessing expertise and an arena to display that expertise, all of which are strong motivators for both participation and learning.

WORKS CITED

Boyd, Frances A. "Business English and the Case Method: A Reassessment." TESOL Quarterly. vol. 25. no. 4 (Winter 1991): 729-34.